



# Who Benefits?

*They say that getting benefits data is hard to do*

by Mark Knold

Employers providing benefits (from vacation time to health care) are a common part of an employee's total compensation package. Employers know and accept this. To stay competitive, employers want market information about benefit packages. What should I offer as a fair benefits package? What do other companies offer?

### Survey the Employers

Employer surveys are the only way to answer these questions. These surveys are conducted by both the government and the private sector. In Utah, the government is not in the business of collecting employer benefits information, but the private sector is. One source is The Employers Council, a nonprofit, member-supported association of

employers serving the Intermountain West. Their periodic survey covers nearly 200 Utah employers of varying size, asking 240 questions covering personnel policy and benefit practices.

### Sources

On a national level, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is a source, with its National Compensation Survey. Here is how they describe it: The National Compensation Survey (NCS) provides comprehensive measures of occupational earnings, compensation cost trends (ECI, ECEC), benefit incidence, and detailed benefit provisions (EBS). These statistics are available for select metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, regions, and the nation.

BLS goes on to describe their benefit analysis: NCS also collects data on benefit incidence (the percentage of workers with access to and participation in employer provided benefit plans) and detailed benefit provisions. Availability, plan provision, and employee cost (i.e., required employee premiums for insurance or required contributions) data are published for various benefit categories. In addition, the NCS program collects limited data on emerging (or nontraditional) benefits such as educational assistance, employee wellness, and adoption assistance programs; travel accident and long-term care insurance; supplemental unemployment, flexible workplace, and fitness center benefits; and child care and commuting subsidies.

What may seem like an unfortunate aspect is the timing of this survey. The latest results were released July 2002 based upon 2000 data. Since benefit packages don't change overnight, these survey results are still a useful tool. Here is a summary of some of their findings: Paid time off continued to be the most prevalent benefit available to workers in private establishments in 2000.

Paid vacations were available to 80 percent of employees and paid holidays to 77 percent of employees in private industry.

More results: 52 percent of employees in private industry participated in medical care plans. Of these, premiums were fully paid by the employer for 32 percent of those with single coverage plans, and 19 percent of those with family coverage.

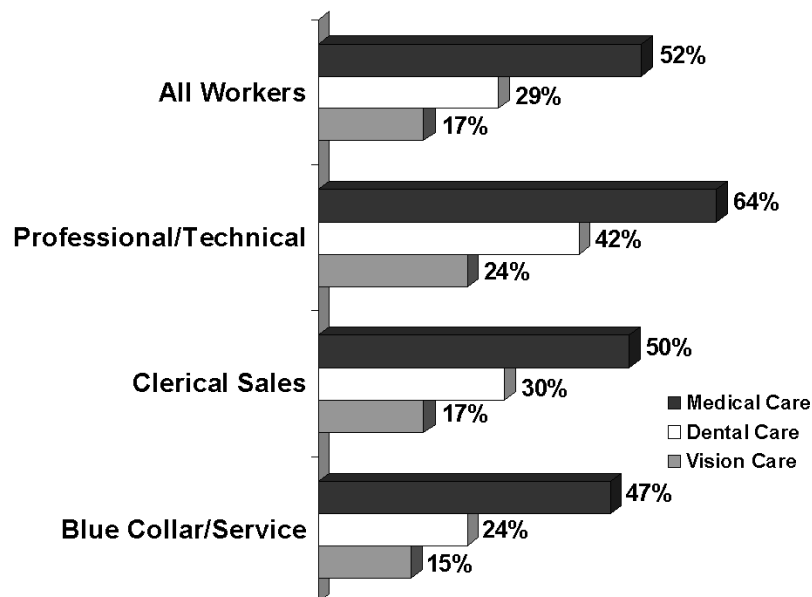
### A Final Tool

Here's one final BLS tool. It is the Employment Cost Index (ECI). Similar to how the Consumer Price Index works, the ECI measures the increase in the cost of wages and benefits on a national level. Its results are published quarterly, and can be a valuable tool for gauging how rapidly wage and benefit costs rise.

Learn to use these sources. Information is power and your company can benefit.

**For more information on benefits:**  
<http://stats.bls.gov/home.htm>  
<http://www.ebri.org/>

### ***Percent of 2000 U.S. Workers Participating in Selected Health Care Benefits\****



\*Private Sector  
Source: National Compensation Survey.